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Dear Senator Gaston, Rep. Boyd, Senator Cicarella, Rep. Howard and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

Thank you for raising Senate Bill 972, An Act Concerning Crisis Intervention Training for Police Officers and Collaboration Between Police Officers and Social Workers. I have long advocated for crisis intervention training (CIT) to be made available for all police officers in our state. Connecticut has made great strides in recent years to raise awareness and offer training to our law enforcement community. We must continue to prioritize this training and to increase collaboration between social workers and law enforcement officers.

I applaud the fantastic work that the Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement (CABLE) has done to train police officers, with the support of the Connecticut State Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POST), to ensure that officers are equipped with the tools necessary to respond to mental health crises. However, more funding is necessary as the demand for classes exceeds the course offerings available. We must continue to support police departments with the vital resources they need to respond to and deescalate crisis situations. I continue to hear this concern from constituents and have seen the successful impact of trained crisis intervention officers in my own district.

Additionally, we need to continue to promote collaboration between mental health professionals and police officers. Police are often the first responders to individuals in acute distress, and sometimes they are the only responders. In my district I have seen social workers partner effectively with police departments. Some towns have hired police social workers who are able to make clinical assessments and provide invaluable guidance at a moment's notice. Together, social workers and police are building the relationships necessary to tackle community problems and resolve them before it leads to an arrest. However, more funding, support and encouragement is needed for our law enforcement organizations. While there are pockets of municipalities who have created great models of how this is of terrific benefit to the communities they serve, they are still few and far between. It really comes down to resources and education.

I would suggest changes to the proposed bill to include resources for POST and CABLE to continue their collaborative work to offer more courses on crisis intervention. Additionally, I would respectfully request the inclusion of language to help our police departments across the state by providing information and education on the value of coordinating with mental health professionals and when possible, the hiring of dedicated police social workers or on-staff social workers. Anything we can do to encourage this training and coordination is of tremendous benefit to the citizens of our state.

It is evident that police departments that utilize crisis intervention teams and social workers benefit the community by deescalating and preventing situations that may result in a tragic outcome. I urge the committee to move S.B. 972 forward, with suggested changes, to ensure that all police departments are afforded this opportunity for training, collaboration and increased public safety. Thank you again for considering this legislation.